

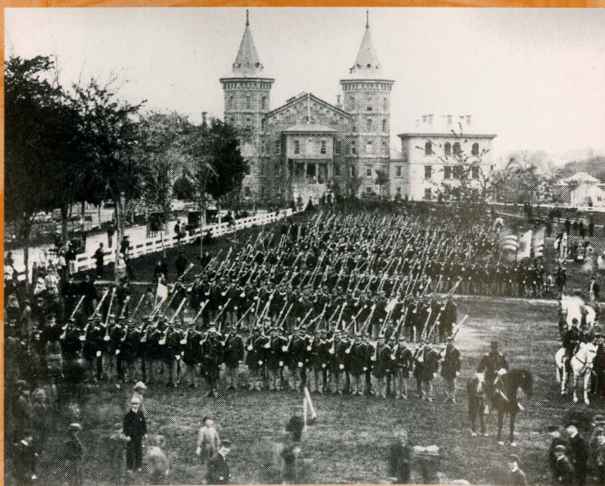
South Common Historic District

Lowell's National Register
Neighborhoods



LOWELL HISTORIC BOARD

The South Common Historic District includes one of Lowell's earliest public open spaces as well as a diverse array of public and private buildings. Within the District's boundaries are fine examples of mid 19th century houses built for Lowell's growing merchant class, a variety of civic and institutional structures, and an internationally known industrial complex. Examples of the Gothic, Italianate, Second Empire, Stick, Queen Anne, and Romanesque Revival styles can be found in the District.



Right:
South
Common
ca. 1884
Pollard
Memorial
Library



Early Development

The 22.5 acre South Common was purchased (along with the North Common) by the City from the Proprietors of Locks and Canals in 1845 at an auction where the corporation was divesting itself of much of its non-industrial land holdings. The South Common became a focal point for the construction of stylish residences, county courthouse and jail, three churches, and two schools.

The basin-like topography of the Common was accentuated by an early granite-faced oval pond which, by the late 19th century, had a six-jet fountain spraying a graceful arc of water into the pond. Like the North Common, the South Common was carefully laid out and planted, although no master plan for its design is known.

Left:
South
Common
and jail,
date
unknown
Lowell
Historical
Society

By 1905, the Park Commission made plans to create more recreational opportunities on the Common, providing it with much of its present appearance and function. In 1905 a running track and baseball diamond were installed and a children's outdoor "gymnasium" planned. In 1962, the Edith Nourse Rogers School was built on a site that had been occupied by a school since the 1830s.

Architectural Development

Facing each other across the north and south sides of the Common are Summer and Highland Streets where house lots were created in the mid 19th century. In the late 1850s and 1860s, fine Italianate and Second Empire houses were erected on the south side of Highland Street overlooking the Common. By 1872, the entire street had been developed.

Right:
58
Highland
Street

The earliest houses in the District are those in the Italianate style. First appearing in Washington Square in Lower Belvidere in the 1840s, Italianate homes were inspired by the architecture of Italian villas.

58 Highland Street (late 1850s) is one of the most ornate Italianate residences



in Lowell with the use of ornamental brackets, flush board siding scored to simulate stone, quoins, and bay windows. Other Italianate style residences in the District include the Benjamin Webber House (14 Highland Street; ca. 1858), 26 Highland Street; (late 1850s), and the Appleton Company Agents House (42-44 Highland Street; 1860s).

Several examples of the Second Empire style exist from the 1860s and 1870s. Second Empire residences in the District include the Asahel Puffer House (62 Highland Street; ca. 1871), 48 Highland Street (1860s), and 54 Highland Street (1860s).

Right:
181
Summer
Street



Summer Street developed a decade after Highland Street with several homes in the Italianate and Second Empire styles while others were built in the Stick style. Stick style homes stress the

wall surface as a decorative feature. The Sylvanus Bartlett House (181 Summer Street; late 1860s) has ornamental woodwork characteristic of the Stick style overlaid on its gable end. The George Cady House (163 Summer Street; ca. 1870) also exhibits Stick style detail including stickwork trusses.

The District also contains several significant civic, institutional, and industrial structures. In 1850, fifteen years after Lowell was designated the northern seat of Middlesex County, the Middlesex County Courthouse was completed. In 1897, an addition to the courthouse

was built along Gorham Street.

Right:
Lowell
Jail



The Lowell Jail (Thorndike Street; 1856) was designed by Lowell resident James Rand in the Romanesque Revival and Italianate styles. The massive granite structure, flanked by

brick Italianate wings, had cells located in the central portion and north wing including separate quarters for female inmates. The south wing housed a jailor and sheriff's residence. In 1919 the jail was closed, sold to the Roman Catholic Church, and converted into Keith Academy, a boy's Catholic school. Today the building houses condominiums.

Several churches are also located in the District. The earliest and most modest is St. John's Episcopal Church (Gorham Street; 1861). Its narrow pointed arch windows are characteristic of the Gothic style. St. John's was organized as an outgrowth of St. Anne's Church on Merrimack Street.

The Eliot Church (273 Summer Street; 1873-74) was designed by architect S.S. Woodcock of Somerville in the High Victorian Gothic style. The church is constructed of brick with sandstone and marble trim while

Right:
Detail,
Eliot
Church



stained glass and tracery fill most of the windows. It sits on the site of the log cabin and school of John Eliot who

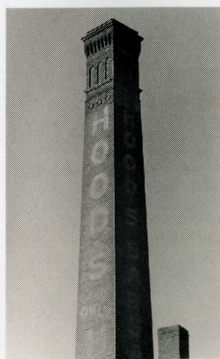
preached Christianity to local Native Americans in 1648.

The last church in the District, St. Peter's (Gorham Street; 1892-1900), closed in 1986 and after a decade-long effort to save it, was demolished in 1996. Designed by prominent architect Patrick Keely, St. Peter's was an imposing granite Gothic structure. Other Lowell works of Keely's include the Immaculate Conception Church (1868) and St. Michael's Church (1884-1900). St. Peter's Italianate rectory (1890-91) still stands on Gorham Street.

The Eliot School (10 Favor Street; 1889) was built in the Queen Anne style and is similar to other Lowell schools from the 1880s. The structure's irregular massing is characteristic of the style as is the combining of building materials such as granite, brick, sandstone, and wood. The building was designed by Otis Merrill and Olin Cutler, architects of Lowell's City Hall.

Right:
Hood
Smokestack

In 1893, the Hood Sarsaparilla Laboratory (Thorndike Street; 1883-93) was the largest building in the world devoted to the manufacture of medicines. One of Lowell's many patent medicine companies, the company was founded in 1878 by Charles Hood who patented a new medicine known as sarsaparilla, intended to cure neuralgic pains. The laboratory was carefully designed to accommodate all phases of the medicine manufacturing process from manufacturing to the production of promotional materials.



The Second Empire Style

Several homes around South Common are built in the Second Empire style. The style takes its name from the reign of Napoleon III (1852-70), France's Second Empire, during which many buildings were built in France with the distinctive mansard roof.

The boxy mansard roof allowed full use of the attic story and consequently, the style became very popular for new construction as well as the remodeling of existing buildings. The roof is often punctured by dormers and dormer windows of various shapes.

The Second Empire style borrows heavily from the Italianate style. Ornamental brackets under the roof cornice and under door and window hoods are often found on Second Empire residences. First appearing during the 1850s in the United States, the Second Empire style dominated American house construction between 1860 and 1880.

The Asahel Puffer House (62 Highland Street; ca. 1871) is prominently sited at the corner of Highland and Thorndike Streets. This Second Empire style residence's slate mansard roof is pierced by arched dormers while an ornate portico and side porch illustrate other popular features of the period.



Left:
62
Highland
Street

Middlesex County Courthouse

Lowell was designated the northern seat of Middlesex County in 1835, an event that had a great influence on the city's growth by attracting many lawyers and businessmen to Lowell. Originally located in the Central Market House (1837) on Market Street, the County Court moved to Gorham Street in 1850.

The Middlesex County Courthouse (1850; 1897) consists of two large attached buildings. The original courthouse, designed by Ammi Young, was built in the Romanesque Revival style and sits to the rear of the site. The brick structure is offset by decorative wood trim found in window hoods and arcaded cornice while the roof is crowned with an octagonal clock tower topped by symbolic scales of justice.

Young, whose previous work included the Customs House in Boston, had been a pupil of Alexander Parris, architect of Boston's Quincy Market. After completing the Lowell courthouse, he was appointed Superintending Architect of the United States Treasury Department. Young designed over 50 public buildings throughout the country during his ten years in Washington.

The 1850 courthouse was moved to the rear of the lot in 1895 and an addition built along Gorham Street. Designed by Olin Cutler, the addition used Classical elements such as pedimented windows and fluted columns.



Who's Who at South Common

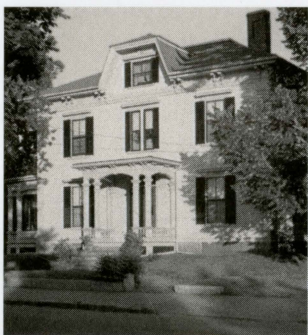
Right:
Detail,
58
Highland
Street

Early residents of the South Common area represented a cross-section of Lowell's business class. The area attracted residents drawn to the many homes prominently sited above the Common.



Asahel Puffer, who resided at 62 Highland Street, operated a wholesale flour business. 58 Highland Street was owned for many years by the Dows family who manufactured cough cures and other medicines under the family name. Both 62 and 58 Highland Street were purchased by St. Peter's Church in 1916 for use as a convent until a permanent building was erected in 1933 (demolished). Thomas Entwistle, an inventor of textile machinery, lived at 48 Highland Street.

Right:
42-44
Highland
Street



The Appleton Manufacturing Company owned 42-44 Highland Street as a residence for its agents during the latter decades of the 19th century. This same house was occupied by Henry Rourke, a local architect, in the first decades of the

20th century. Rourke was responsible for the conversion of the Lowell Jail into Keith Academy.

Left:
Detail,
Middlesex
County
Courthouse

163 Summer Street was built by George Cady, a wire goods manufacturer. Sylvanus Bartlett, a manufacturer and bottler of soda, ale, and mineral water, resided at 181 Summer Street.

The National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation's resources worthy of preservation for their architectural, historical, or cultural value. The National Register was established in 1966 as a list of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archeology, and culture. Buildings that have contributed to the development of the Nation and the Commonwealth, which are over fifty years old and not altered significantly, may be eligible.

Listing on the National Register does not place restrictions or limitations on the use, alteration, or disposition of private property. Listing does provide some protection from adverse action due to Federal or State funding, permitting, or licensing. Additionally, certain property owners who rehabilitate income-producing certified historic properties may be eligible for federal tax credits.

The Lowell Historic Board

Established by state statute in 1983, the Lowell Historic Board serves to preserve and protect the historic and architectural resources of the Downtown Lowell Historic District while encouraging economic development and tourism in the District's historic setting. As the City of Lowell's historic preservation agency, the Board also maintains the city's inventory of historic structures and sites. The Board also provides technical assistance and information on preservation to property owners citywide in addition to publishing educational and outreach materials and sponsoring several workshops and events throughout the year.

Resources

For additional information about the South Common Historic District, other National Register or historic sites in Lowell, and historic preservation, contact:

Lowell Historic Board

J.F.K. Civic Center
50 Arcand Drive
Lowell, MA 01852
(508) 970-4270

For additional information about the National Register, contact:

Massachusetts Historical Commission

220 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125
(617) 727-8470

National Register of Historic Places

Interagency Resources Division
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127
(202) 343-9536

For information on architectural styles, preservation, and restoration, try:

A Field Guide to American Houses

Virginia and Lee McAlester
New York: Alfred A. Knopf (1985)

The Old House Journal Guide to Restoration

Patricia Poore, editor
Old House Journal Corporation
(1992)

As you explore the South Common Historic District, please respect the rights of property owners by not trespassing and remaining on public property as you view the many historic resources of the District.

This brochure is based upon the National Register of Historic Places registration form for the South Common Historic District (Elizabeth Durfee Hengen and Candace Jenkins, 1982) on file at the Lowell Historic Board, the Massachusetts Historical Commission, and the National Register of Historic Places, Washington, D.C.

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